Leader of the Opposition

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ELECTORAL TALK

The Senate has for three years been the safeguard of Australian's freedom.

The decision of the people, reaffirmed in May last year that the Opposition Parties should have a majority in the Senate has prevented a series of authoritarian bills becoming law at the expense of individual freedom and of democracy in Australia.

The bills hide their hard facts behind dull phrases.

If Labor were to gain control of the Senate those bills would be rushed through and the structure of tyranny erected.

One of the worst is the Interstate Commission Bill, which was pushed through the House of Representatives in 53 minutes. It alone contains enough muscle to create a totalitarian Australia.

The bill purports to set up a Commission to regulate transport between the states. But the Commission's authority would be vast.

Its power to investigate would be unrestricted, it would be able to make orders which would over-ride both Commonwealth and State laws.

Firms which disobey the Commission would be liable to be fined $50,000 a day and individuals $10,000 a day.

Newspaper cartoonists and commentators should be extremely wary. The fine for insulting a member of the Commission would be $1,000 or three months gaol.

In short, the bill contains terrifying powers of coercion and punishment.

Another government bill blocked by the Senate was an amendment to the Television and Broadcasting Act. This bill proposes to set up a television and broadcasting authority with power to do all the things necessary for its effective functioning. These are polite words for doing whatever it likes.
This television authority would be able to dictate the nature and content of all television programmes, from drama to political commentary and news.

It is an insidious and dangerous piece of legislation opening the way to censorship and news management. It would take from Parliament the power it now has to scrutinize the present broadcasting control board.

Another so-called reform of the Whitlam government is the Electoral Bill, which is supposed to restrict campaign expenditure by political parties. However, it is heavily weighted in favour of the Labor Party, and against the Opposition, which would be lucky to survive it.

The Electoral Bill would limit candidates' spending during elections. However it exempts payments made by branches, divisions or other parts of a party. Unions which are affiliated to the Labor Party and are thus parts of the Labor Party could give money which would not be counted as expenditure by an ALP candidate. However, business firms, which are not part of the Liberal Party or any other party would be drastically restricted in their donations.

A party which overspends could be fined $2 million and its office holders $10,000 whether or not they were aware of any overspending in the terms of this bill.

Now let us look at the Purchasing Commission which at first glance just seems another example of the Whitlam government's desire for bureaucratic tidiness.

The Purchasing Commission would take over the job of procuring goods, works and services for all federal departments.

That sounds simple, but its massive scale gives it immense purchasing power, far outstripping the economic weight of the biggest companies in Australia.

With the government now occupying 31% of the economy such a Commission would enable the government to bend and manipulate all sections of the community. It could coerce suppliers and cripple or bankrupt firms which don't promote government policies.

Like the other bills, the Purchasing Commission Bill is about power - capricious, ideological power over your money and your life.
The Whitlam government wants to set up its own national police force, a proposal condemned by the Victorian Council of Civil Liberties as a major threat to civil liberties.

But you cannot have a totalitarian state without a national police force to push the people around. The Whitlam government wants its own national police for this purpose.

These are only some of the bills held up in the Senate.

The whole thrust of the government in the last three years has been to establish arbitrary powers and to take to itself additional authority to govern by regulation.

The people of Australia can be grateful to the Senate. It is the major bastion in Australia today against the Whitlam assault on their freedoms.

Without the Senate, all the powers I have mentioned would already be law.

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